

Returning to Work Following Military Duty

Overview

Adjusting back to work following military duty.

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- Making the transition
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Returning to the work force after deployment requires some readjustment, even if you were away from your civilian job for only a few months. You may be returning to the same job or a new position, or to a job that has changed in your absence. Getting used to the change of pace, and adjusting to both new and familiar faces and activities can take time. Here are some ways to help make the transition smoother.

What to expect

When you return to work you may face some of these adjustments:

- *You may feel “out of place” for a time.* You may feel really happy to be home and back at work. At the same time, you may feel some resentment that co-workers have done fine without you. These feelings are a normal part of the adjustment process.
- *You may find civilian life less exciting than the military experience.* Civilian life and work responsibilities may seem uninteresting compared to active-duty responsibilities. This may be especially true if you were deployed in active combat situations.
- *You may feel extra tired, less motivated than usual, or occasionally discouraged.* There may be no single reason for these feelings. You may not be able to jump back into work with your usual focus or enthusiasm right away. These feelings are a normal part of the adjustment process.
- *You may need to take it slow.* Anticipation that has built up since you knew you were coming home may cause you to want to do everything at once. Keep in mind that your body is adjusting to a time-zone change and to many new things that happened while you were away. That can make this time harder than you expected.
- *People and circumstances may have changed.* You are coming from a place where everyone understood your mission, job, and special talents. Once you’ve returned home, most people around you won’t really understand your experience in the military and war. Change is normal and expected, but it can make you feel out of sync for a time.

It’s important to keep in mind that re-integration to civilian life is more of a process than a single event. It usually takes several months for returning service personnel to feel fully back into the swing of things. The adjustment often takes

place gradually, sometimes in almost unnoticeable ways. If you give yourself enough time, you'll adjust according to your own timetable.

Talking with co-workers and your manager

Here are some ways to make the adjustment back to work go more smoothly:

- *Find out about workplace changes that took place in your absence.* Schedule time with your supervisor to talk about any changes that took place at work while you were away. Ask for information. You may want to ask for background or context information about certain decisions or changes. Discuss how these changes will affect you and the work you do. Talk with co-workers, too, about the changes that took place while you were gone.
- *Do your homework to find out how the business or organization has changed in your absence.* Perhaps there are memos or correspondence you could read. With permission, look at reports or evaluations of work in your area. This will help make conversations with your supervisor more productive.
- *Thank people who may have covered for you in your absence.* You might say, "Thanks for the work you did covering for me while I was deployed. It feels good to be back."
- *Talk about your deployment experiences, but in moderation.* It's fine to talk about your recent military experiences. Most people will be interested in hearing about them. But don't overdo it. Keep in mind that some people may not want to know all about your experiences. And ask that people respect your feelings if they want more information than you would prefer to give.
- *Be sure to show interest in how your co-workers are doing and what news you missed about them in your absence.*
- *Think about how your military experiences could be used to make a contribution to your job now.* Chances are, you have experience with new tools, work methods, and management techniques that could help your organization succeed. Look for opportunities to share what you've learned with your supervisor. It could make a real difference.

Making the transition

Here are some tips to help you ease back into work the first days and weeks:

- *Don't overschedule yourself, especially your first days back.*
- *Realize that your return to the workplace may be an adjustment for your co-workers as well as for you.* A co-worker who filled in for you while you were away may now be facing a job change.
- *Meet new people who joined the organization in your absence.*

Finding support

Here are suggestions on finding support as you make the adjustment back to work:

- *Seek support if you are having problems coping or if you could use help during the readjustment period.* Seek support from friends, family, and your supervisor or employer.
- *Use the military resources that are available to you.* The military offers many sources of support for service members both before and after a deployment. One helpful Web site is the Army site www.hooah4health.com (click on “Deployment” and then on “Family Matters”).
- *If needed, ask for accommodations at work during the adjustment period.* This may require some negotiating with your supervisor. If part-time rather than full-time work would help, for example, talk with your supervisor about this possibility. A timetable and milestones could be set to help you both know when a change to full-time is right.
- *Ask your supervisor for the support you need to learn new tasks.*
- *If you need help resolving a problem with a co-worker or your supervisor, consider talking with a professional.*
- *Keep in mind that the adjustment period can take six weeks or so.* The time varies from person to person. But if you aren’t feeling back to yourself several weeks after your return, you may want to talk with a professional. Your employee assistance program (EAP) or employee resource program can help you find support and resources.